

Dismal Bronx, Brooklyn areas have potential

The Bronx's University Heights and Brooklyn's Broadway Junction in East New York are industrial areas that have been snubbed but are ripe for development, according to new Urban Land Institute reports.

ARTICLE

COMMENTS

BY JOE ANUTA 

SEPTEMBER 23, 2014 12:01 A.M.

 Print

 Email

 Reprints

 Comment

A A

Two low-income, desolate corners of the city have potential to become major mixed-use communities, according to a pair of reports released Monday by the Urban Land Institute.

The reports, which stemmed from a pair of two-day panel discussions convened earlier this summer by ULI New York, the local chapter of the Washington D.C.-based think tank, outline short- and long-term goals to unlock development opportunities along the [University Heights waterfront in the Bronx](#), and the [Broadway Junction area in East New York, Brooklyn](#). The Urban Land Institute recommendations complement proposals released by the city earlier this year.

The University Heights waterfront along the Harlem River is currently a strip of mostly industrial properties and parking lots largely cut off from the rest of the Bronx neighborhood by both Metro-North railroad tracks and the Major Deegan Expressway. Only a few circuitous pedestrian routes allow access there, but the report notes that the waterfront nevertheless has potential because it is next to a Long Island Rail Road stop and within walking distance of MTA Select Bus Service, the No. 4 subway farther inland and the No. 1 subway, which is across a bridge that connects the area to Inwood in Manhattan. But before any development can occur there, the perception of the waterfront needs to change.

"You need to put it on people's radar," said Barry Hersh, a real estate professor at New York University who chaired the panel. "Even developers who are active in the Bronx haven't really focused on this location."

To draw attention to the area, the panel suggested branding the Harlem River the People's River, and constructing a marina on city-owned property that would help foster water sports, fishing and barbecuing. In addition, the report echoed a comprehensive study of the area by the Department of City Planning that suggested a series of pedestrian bridges and stairways that would help connect the adjacent community to the river. Eventually, the reimagined waterfront would be a site for residential development, the report suggested, and might even result in decks over the highway.

The idea is much the same in Broadway Junction in East New York, Brooklyn—another desolate neighborhood that boasts a strong transportation network.

"Places like Broadway Junction were designed as transit hubs, but the idea of transit-oriented development only came afterward," said Janice Barnes, a principal at architecture and design firm Perkins + Will, who chaired the Brooklyn panel.

Part of the problem is there is no street-level activity in the area, which is crisscrossed by noisy overhead tracks and seen as unsafe.

The report echoed calls from the de Blasio administration earlier this year to close several roads and consolidate land ownership to foster a more pedestrian-friendly environment and lure large mixed-use tenants. It also specifically proposed repurposing an abandoned Long Island Rail Road substation into office space for manufacturers and other creative companies in the city—a development similar to the Industry City complex in Sunset Park, Brooklyn.

The pair of reports note that future development in the two areas would also help the de Blasio administration meet its mandate of creating affordable housing across the city, according to Felix Ciampa, executive director of Urban Land Institute New York.

"Through these conversations, we thought our members could provide some important, market-based ideas to implement transit-oriented development," he said.